

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

August 14, 1961

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MEMORANDUM FOR MR. BUNDY

FROM: W.W.

I have tentatively concluded that two things are required at the present juncture with respect to Berlin.

1. The proper line at the moment, it seems to me, would be to demand a negotiation on the whole question of Germany and Berlin. We should take the view that the weakness and incompetence of the Ulbricht regime is leading to a situation which might trigger a general war unwanted by the major powers. We do not propose to let this irresponsible regime lead us by the nose into war. We are, therefore, immediately asking for negotiations among the four responsible powers concerned, at a particular time and place, and are prepared forthwith to enter into diplomatic discussions on the agenda.

This approach requires that the President reverse the bad Western postwar habit of regarding negotiation as a sign of weakness. In the wake of the President's speech and the recent GDR action, I am confident he could do this in an atmosphere of strength.

2. As part of the above exercise, it is important at the highest level in the U.S. and in agreement with our Allies, that the Western position be distinguished with respect to three kinds of Commun'ist action:

-- A sealing of the East Berlin frontiers. This is a dangerous action of a weak and insecure regime. It violates inter-allied agreements. It endangers the peace. We have protested and we actively seek responsible four-power negotiation; but it is not an act which justifies Western military retaliation nor a breaking off of all economic or other de facto relations with the East German Republic.

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By [initials] NARS, Date 10/18/81

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-- The Soviet signing of a peace treaty with East Germany. This is an act which we regard as illegal, being in violation of four-power agreements concerning a unified German settlement; moreover, it is unwise attempting, as it does, to perpetuate the division of a country in defiance of powerful long-run historical forces. Again, however, it is an act which we do not regard as a cause of war.

-- Interference with access, civil or military, to West Berlin. This is a situation to which we would take the strongest countermeasures necessary to assert our own and Western rights.

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